DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 388 620 SP 036 246

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TITLE	Creating a Learning Alliance: A Democratic Teacher Preparation Program.
PUB DATE	Jan 95
NOTE	14p.; Paper presented at the Extended Annual Meeting of the Association of Independent Liberal Arts Colleges for Teacher Education (Washington, DC, February 1995).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*College School Cooperation; *Democratic Values; Educational Principles; Elementary Education; Higher Education; Preservice Teacher Education; *Professional Development; *Professional Development Schools; Program Development; *Program Implementation; *Teacher Education Curriculum; Teacher Role
IDENTIFIERS	Teacher Development; University of Indianapolis IN

ABSTRACT

This paper reviews ways in which the University of Indianapolis (Indiana) utilized its professional development school (PDS) program as a vehicle for promoting inclusion of democratic ideals in the teacher education program. Three issues related to implementation of the PDS partnership are discussed: balance and shift of roles, direction and pace of change, and means of balancing the professional needs of all. The central focus of the efforts to restructure the teacher education program were attempts to connect the curriculum to real world experiences and to provide authentic tasks for preservice teachers. Input from a task force that included other local higher education institutions and teachers and administrators from the Indianapolis Public Schools helped to shape the university faculty's decisions about which schools to select. Descriptions are given of the roles played by teachers, university faculty, and preservice students in establishing a democratic learning alliance. Also discussed are methods courses; field experiences; a new PDS staff position (teacher-in-residence); and professional development activities for preservice and inservice teachers, as well as university faculty. (Contains 13 references.) (IAH)

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Creating a Learning Alliance: A Democratic Teacher Preparation Program

by Dr. E. Lynne Weisenbach and Dr.Nancy Steffel
University of Indianapolis
January 1995

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Any program focusing on the education of prospective teachers should keep as a central focus one of the basic missions of schools: the inculturation of young into a democracy. In the classroom setting, however, the teacher is usually presumed to have a monopoly on knowledge and expertise, with student voices often absent. In addition, in school-university "collaboratives," the university faculty have often been viewed as the experts rather than partners entering into shared conversation with colleagues from another setting. In both instances, silence of the "lesser" partner is the norm. Fernandez-Balboa & Marshall (1994) address this when they note "because citizenry is educated to be silent, there is little wonder why they do not participate in democracy" (p.172). This paper will examine three issues involved in restructuring a teacher education program to include democratic ideals through a Professional Development Schools (PDS) partnership. The issues to be discussed are:

- the balance and shift of roles
- the direction and pace of change
- suggested means of balancing professional development needs of all

Background

In 1991, the teacher education program at the University of Indianapolis began a significant process of change. Goodlad's Teachers for our Nation's Schools (1990) provided a large part of the vision and rationale behind the change. The faculty had lengthy discussions about the nineteen postulates and the impact they would have on the program. In addition, the mission of the School of Education provided a framework for discussion. Even within a university faculty, maintaining democratic ideals during this

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stage was challenging. Two basic areas that emerged from the focused discussions were:

1) What is the purpose of our program and how should it include public education? Should our program attempt to improve schools or should we be content to graduate competent students?
2) How do our students learn and therefore types of instruction are best?

On the one hand, most faculty described themselves as taking a constructivist approach to education, but was this being modeled in classes? In the program? Friere (1985) challenges that students not only have the capacity to acquire their own knowledge from experiences, but they can also teach each other and the teacher. According to Giroux and McLaren (1986) "school and classroom practices should in some manner, be organized around forms of learning which serve to prepare students for responsible roles as transformative intellectuals, as community members, and as critically active citizens outside of school" (p. 237).

As we evaluated our program, we noted that all members within the Department of Teacher Education were involved in direct instruction with undergraduate students teaching nearly all "core" courses. Unlike most larger institutions, we had a number of colleagues in the College of Arts and Sciences who participated in teacher education. Also, our student teaching phase was stronger than many universities' programs; students were supervised by regular faculty with biweekly seminars scheduled to maintain connections. On the other hand, although we offered early and continuing field experiences, they were loosely organized and frequently did not mirror the philosophy of the courses. Our students' roles in the development of their curriculum was minimal. Additionally, our faculty had little input with schools, and their teachers had little voice in our teacher education program. Change and improvement could only occur if all parties were able to contribute their ideas, needs, and resources. We needed to expand our collaboration through democratic means to allow everyone to contribute and create classrooms, as Hill and Hancock describe (1993), where students and teachers "make connections, communicate ideas, reach out to influence others and achieve satisfaction and enjoyment" (p.122) through their common experiences.

Listening to the preservice and practicing teachers, we heard their message: "Real World, please!" Making connections to real world

experiences became the essential core of our change. Fox (1993) highlights the influential role that authentic tasks serve for preservice teachers. She explains:

> "For some years we gave the following assignment: the students should write a letter to the parents of a class of imaginary children explaining the recent innovations and peculiarities in the teaching of reading and writing. It was never brilliantly executed. It was not a real letter; it was an assignment to be marked. It didn't matter to the students ; they only had a temporary investment in it, which was to pass the course, and they didn't ache with caring over the response because the audience was imaginary and the response therefore impossible" (p.3).

Educators at the university level, just like those at school level, must provide opportunities for students to connect real experiences with their course curriculum and thus, ensure their best efforts. Second, with the intense competition for obtaining a teaching position upon graduation, students are demanding that they receive the best experiences to enhance their professional resumes and portfolios. Finally, schools need and welcome extra support in fulfilling their mission to educate all children especially with continued budget cuts and increased teaching demands. Why not channel the preservice teachers' time and energy into working with real children and teachers throughout their studies not just their senior year during student teaching? Why not allow school teachers to join university educators in preparing their future colleagues to meet the current and future demands in teaching?

Professional development schools offer new organizational arrangements and collaborative relationships for universities, public schools, and the students they serve. As Lanier (1994) notes, PDS's are:

> "not simply schools that would be good places for preparing future teachers. PDS's are places for responsible, enduring innovation in education. They are not simply places for restructuring schools - 'fixing them so we get them right this time.' Rather, they are places of ongoing invention and discovery; places where school and university faculty together carry on the applied study and demonstration of the good practice and policy the profession needs to improve learning for young students and prospective educators" (p. ix).

After lengthy discussion, the faculty agreed to move towards professional development schools. It was also agreed that we would initially work with schools at the elementary level. This decision was made because we have a small (ten member) faculty, most of whom have other significant programmatic responsibilities. We wanted to "do it right" and gradually move towards middle and high school.

Balance and shifting of roles

"Doing it right" entailed a variety of shifts and balances. The first and most pressing need was education about existing professional development schools. After being awarded with a planning grant from Lilly Endowment, we established a task force, conducted site visits, and hosted an informational seminar. The task force was comprised of representatives from the University of Indianapolis, the Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS), the Indianapolis Education Association (IEA), and Martin University, a local university whose primary mission is the education of black adult learners. After extensive reading on existing PDS projects throughout the nation, members visited the Urban Teacher Education Program (UTEP) program in Gary, IN. The influence of the task force upon the teacher education program should not be underestimated and represented a fundamental shift -- a group outside the university directly influencing the decision making process within the department. To disseminate the information about PDS, the task force organized a seminar for college faculty as well as teachers and administrators from the Indianapolis Public Schools. For the first time in many years, the university faculty and their colleagues in public education were learning together about something which could directly impact the way their programs (and hence their teaching) might be structured.

The selection process for determining schools for our PDS partnership involved three stages: applications received from interested schools, site visits by university faculty, and a collaborative decision made by the faculty and task force. As was expected, our beliefs about teaching and learning were openly debated throughout the process. The democratic exchange of ideas between the faculty and the task force facilitated a consensus on the selection of three PDS sites. Again, a shift of roles had occurred; the faculty received direction from the community task force.

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Another critical decision had to be made to select the faculty member would direct the move into the unchartered waters of our PDS partnership. As a matter of coincidence, a faculty opening existed, so a national search was initiated. The selection criteria for the tenure-track faculty position was focused on someone with extensive and varied experiences in the public schools rather than a wide higher education background. This selection represented yet another shift in roles. From this point on, the pace of change would increase dramatically.

Direction and pace of change

From the onset of this project, it was agreed that teachers, students, and the university faculty play a crucial role in the development of a democratic learning alliance, and change is the result of our sharing of beliefs, ideas, needs, and resources. It was logical to assume that the teacher education program, the university faculty, the university students, the PDS teachers, and the PDS schools themselves would change as a result of the establishment of the alliance. Some changes over the past two years have been predictable while others have been unexpected.

Initially, collaborative relationships had to be established. A progressive dinner was held two months after the selection of the three schools was announced. The newly chosen faculty member (PDS coordinator) visited the schools and officially began her duties in August. Subsequently, meetings were planned with PDS principals and their appointed building coordinators. A joint inservice for all faculties was scheduled at the university in September, and over the next year and a half, these meetings have been held each semester. The participants have enjoyed guest speakers and presentations from each of the faculties about their schools and expertise. Representatives from each building have jointly attended professional meetings both state-wide and nationally to learn how to improve our partnership. A newsletter, Learning Alliance, was created to share information about our collaboration, and a directory of members will soon be published for all to enjoy networking with one another.

Starting in September 1993, sophomore educational psychology students were each placed in PDS schools for observation with a classroom teacher for two hours per week over ten weeks. The junior literacy class

taught by the PDS coordinator, attempted field experiences that were periodically scheduled with individual PDS teachers to allow students to evaluate first grade students' concept of print, determine second grade students' reading and writing abilities, and assist third grade students with a process writing activity. The senior content methods course paired students in PDS classrooms to allow them to teach sample lessons from their thematic units. Although this was a more coordinated effort matching students to the three Indianapolis Public Schools rather than other area schools that students selected, the assignments were still rather contrived and generated by the university faculty with some coordination with the school teachers.

Second semester, winter term 1994, the junior literacy class began the evolution to a different-type of university class. Instead of meeting one hour three times a week in a university classroom with field experiences at the PDS sites arranged separately, the class was scheduled Tuesdays and Thursdays to meet at IPS #68 with the class and field experiences held during 8:30 and 12 noon. Since their school did not start until after 9:00, teachers were invited to sit in on lectures on topics which were announced ahead. Also teachers were invited to guest lecture on topics, such as "Identifying Learning Styles" and "Creating a Mini-economy." Since the school had an economic focus, all of the university students had to have class jobs, such as: environmental engineers, operators, postal clerk, class historian, and social director. They applied and interviewed with a class of fifth grade students to determine their job. They spent their field experiences working in classrooms in pairs teaching reading lessons in grades one through five. Although the school was ten miles from campus and required a twenty minute-drive, the university students enjoyed being at the field site when they were scheduled to work in classrooms. Unfortunately, since it was the first time to try this, not every class session was directly coordinated with a field experience teaching.

During the 1994-5 academic year, the junior literacy courses were all scheduled for Tuesday and Thursday mornings with class and field experiences connected. The course enrollment had doubled and required more extensive planning. Fortunately, teachers came forward with ideas for more involvement. First, three teachers at IPS#34 proposed in the spring to plan a multi-age primary pilot program and asked for the PDS coordinator-literacy instructor to assist with designing an alternate assessment plan. They

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worked throughout the summer and developed curriculum for their mutual classes. Second, thanks to continued support of Lilly Endowment, a teacher-in-residence position was created for a PDS teacher to work half time teaching elementary school and half time working with the teacher education program. Once appointed, this new staff person helped to shape the literacy course field experiences at the other PDS schools.

In the fall the university students met at IPS #34 to help assess their sixty multi-age primary (first and second grade) children in literacy and provide some initial one-on-one instruction. During this time the students studied emergent literacy and beginning literacy instruction. Teachers gave guest lectures on "Handling Parent Conferences" and "Classroom Management." In November the literacy class moved to IPS #68 to work with third and fourth grade students on process writing and primary traiting. University students worked in both grades and observed literacy lessons throughout the building. Every class session was connected with a field experience. The only shortcoming was that sometimes the information presented in the lectures was shortened to allow adequate preparation for the field experience.

Second semester, winter 1995, with the additional meetings and planning with interested teachers, the lectures and field experiences are fully connected. Students are participating in literacy lessons at all five grade levels at IPS #89, will work with mentor teachers in groups of three or four teaching lessons at IPS #68, and then in April, will return to IPS #34 to complete a spring assessment on the multi-age primary children they worked with in the fall. This semester's focus on lesson planning and on-going student assessment will be maintained with the assistance of supportive teachers and the result of our continued partnership.

Meanwhile, in preparation for the senior content methods course, summer planning sessions were held with the professor and interested PDS faculty to plan the course curriculum to be taught entirely at the three schools. With the assistance of the new teacher-in-residence, the total curriculum was organized thematically with guest lectures by different PDS teachers. The students were in the schools for an additional three hours a week for field experience. Some students completed an extended field experience with the same mentor teacher in fulfillment of requirements for the "Reading in the Content Area" course taught for the first time in tandem

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with their methods class. The success of these field experiences was limited by the mentor teachers' understanding and commitment to their preservice teachers, the university faculty's availability to be visible at all three schools, and the students' abilities to communicate and implement the courses' requirements.

Our alliance has also been treated to serendipitous experiences. Since the students were in the schools for their classes and field experiences, they stayed extra time to volunteer to tutor children, substitute for teachers, judge science fairs, and participate in teacher planning meetings. The university has provided additional support to the schools. For two years the university has been instrumental in offering convocations at the PDS sites featuring a guest authors, illustrators, and performers. Extra inservices and grant writing assistance for teachers at the PDS sites have been given by various faculty members . A professor in Arts and Sciences has arranged for a student to teach Spanish to the children in the multi-age primary class at IPS #34. Extra tickets to a college basketball game were given as a reward to the winning school basketball team as well as space rental fees for our auditorium waived for the children to perform their opera from IPS #34.

PDS teachers have taken advantage of the reduced fees for registering for graduate classes at the university. They are involved (with varying levels of success) in the planning of the teacher education courses as part of the belief that:

> "an adequate validating community for learning is not a circle of uncritical and doting yea-sayers. It is an adequate only if its members are capable of providing negative and positive feedback to each other in a context of caring and acceptance" (Beene, 1990, p. 57).

Recently, our teacher-in-residence, a preservice teacher, and the literacy professor proposed a change in course work for the literacy classes: instead of a three hour fall course and a three plus a two hour spring classes the junior year, the hours will be evenly split four hours for fall and four hours for spring with added field experience hours scheduled permanently. The senior reading class was renumber so it will be taught inconjunction to the content methods course, thus solidifying the changes made over the past two years.

Since our business is preparing better future teachers, the most interesting result encountered from our alliance is the change is our students' understanding of what it takes to be a teacher not just how to teach. They

have developed more confidence and a greater sense of professionalism by coming:

> "to grips with the scope of roles, responsibilities, and ways of acting and thinking as emerging professionals...since being a teacher does not cease as you walk out the classroom door. It is ... participation in the school, local and professional communities" (Knowles, Cole, Presswood, 1994, p. 3).

By being in the schools, students must dress, come prepared, and contribute to the class. The students are not passive members listening to information, only to recite it back on examinations and simulated school experiences. No longer are professors solely responsible for the total curriculum. The students have input. As Fox (1993) notes in her teaching:

> "No longer am I the only one who shows the way toward different ... strategies, products, and processes. Through their assignments, my students have taken control, and I'm aware that they are guiding me. The power base has shifted" (p.33).

Students are involved in their educational courses, but also serve on university teacher education committees to help set educational policy. Still, more involvement in developing course curriculum is needed.

Suggested means of balancing professional development needs

Despite much work and planning, creating a balance in professional development needs for in-service teachers, university faculty, and pre-service teachers may be described as what Fullan (1991) would classify as the 'ready, fire, aim' approach to change. The Learning Alliance has initiated a great deal of professional development opportunities. However, there still exists a lack of agreement over the long-term plan/agenda.

There has been a deliberate focus on providing situations for whole group (in-service, pre-service, and university faculty) learning to create a harmonious and involved group of educators and students to improve the learning opportunities for children at the three sites. These have included seminars focused on the needs of all learners, updates on programs within the schools, and authentic assessment. Afternoons set aside by the Indianapolis Public Schools for professional development were utilized for most of the seminars. In one instance, university students served as

substitutes for 15 teachers so that they could attend a full-day seminar. The schools have also offered professional development opportunities to the university faculty and pre-service teachers. When possible, after - school programs are publicized, and all are welcomed to attend.

A grant has been written to provide teachers additional training in literacy education so that their classrooms mirror the curriculum discussed in the literacy education classes. The university senior students would serve as teacher interns in the fall substituting for their assigned mentor teacher so he/she can attend seminars during the school day and together they would implement ideas discussed. In the spring, junior literacy education students would continue working with these mentor teachers as they work to achieve their goals in their classrooms. The teachers would receive graduate credit for their work with mini-grants available to secure additional reading materials.

But, even with these plans, a concern over our continued partnership exists. First, not all university faculty or PDS teachers are active participants, however. Some seem to be intimidated by the thought of becoming involved. Some do not respect the other as a capable and a helpful resource. Others are busy with research projects, professional organizations, and other demands which limit their time. There still exists the challenge to deep the door open and welcoming -- for there are limitless opportunities for teaching and professional growth. As Darling-Hammond (1994) notes:

> "There are many obstacles to be negotiated: development of trust , identification of individual interests and objectives that can become the basis for common goals and mutual interests, creation of ways of talking and ways of working together that can bridge cultural and community differences. The development of the more intimate, even intrusive, form of collaboration required by a PDS is not straight forward.. .PDS are challenging collaborations because they seek to reshape fundamental values, beliefs, and paradigms for schools and schools change while they are negotiating two worlds re-inventing programs" (p. 21).

Additionally, each of the elementary schools has been threatened with being closed since our alliance began. With an unstable situation in the Indianapolis Public Schools about their deficit budget, organization of schools, and placement of staff and children, it adds stress to our relationship. We have experienced a change in principals at IPS #34 which fortunately worked

out since she was interested in continuing our partnership, but what if she was not as supportive? The administrators play a key part to our successful collaboration in each building. Our planning grant which has bound us together will end this May, will all parties want to continue our alliance? We will all need to evaluate how helpful we are for one another.

Finally, time becomes the most influential component to this project's success and future: time for faculty, teachers, ans students to plan and communicate over curricular needs, time for all to share resources of materials and expertise, and time for learning and expanding our horizons.

In summary, to develop a learning alliance democratically, we have learned that one must:

D evelop partnerships between university faculty and its students with the elementary school and its students.

E ducate one another about ones' beliefs and practices.

M ove to work together toward common goals as well as individual needs.

O rganize your time for participation and communication to work together.

C reate means to communicate via newsletters, FAX, and meetings.

R espond to needs with available resources.

A llow for diversity of participation.

C reate curriculum for students utilizing resources and responding to their needs.

Y ield to limitations imposed by areas out of one's control-external forces.

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